



Myrna Jansen-Feliciano

THE FIRST FEMALE DIRECTOR OF ATA

INTRODUCED THE SLOGAN
“UN ARUBA DUSHI PA BIBA,
TA UN ARUBA DUSHI PA BISHITA”

BACHELOR DEGREE IN JOURNALISM

OVER 30 YEARS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

DURING HER TENURE EXPERIENCED:
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001;
NATALEE HOLLOWAY 2005;
AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS 2007/2008

NOW A RETIREE HANDLING A COUPLE
OF PRIVATE BUSINESSES & ENJOYING
BEAUTIFUL THINGS IN LIFE

ENCOURAGES LIVING A BALANCED,
FULLER AND SIMPLER LIFE

Professional Career Development:

Myrna Jansen-Feliciano graduated with her Bachelor's Degree in Journalism in the United States, and immediately landed a job at Hank Meyer and Associates, a famous PR company based in Miami, that represented the Aruba Government for the promotion of tourism in the United States. Here she acquired significant experience for her future career in the tourism industry. She was consequently transferred to the Aruba Tourist Office in New York where she worked for 3 years.

From New York, she was recruited by the Lago Oil & Transport Company to become their Esso News Editor. "For me, Lago was one of the best employers: I received the opportunity to follow many training programs abroad and worked with top professionals."

When the refinery closed in 1985 she was hired by the Aruba Tourism Authority in Aruba to become its first Public Relations Liaison to work with the newly contracted PR company, Lou Hammond and Associates.

From PR Liaison, I was promoted to PR Director after 6 months. "My years as a PR Director gave me significant experience in the tourism industry. The challenges made me strong, resourceful, and creative. I developed a much needed Public Relations Handbook and introduced the consistent use of organic local experiences. We had a good, fun, and caring team. I was also interested and thus got involved in all the departments and all aspects of the organization and the tourism industry. This, together with my commitment and passion for the island, always going the extra mile, and always with the general interest of the island in mind, formed the basis for my career development."

After a few years, she became the Assistant Managing Director, and then Managing Director of ATA, at 44 years of age for 8 years. ATA had about 70 employees, 9 overseas offices and/or representation companies, and multiple international contracts with PR/Marketing/Advertising companies in each country or region. "The scope of work of ATA is wide-ranging and the responsibility is immense. A significant part is built around international relationships with international partners such as airlines, tour operators, travel agents, media, work relationships with international advertising, marketing, and PR companies. Of course, also with local tourism industry partners, government and the community."

Biggest challenge? "My biggest challenge was working with a budget totally dependent on the government's finances, and working with an ATA that was still a government department with all its limitations vs a Sui Generis."

Myrna's final years in the official tourism business was as Senior Advisor to the Minister of Tourism & Transportation for 5 years, and for 7 years as a

Supervisory Board member of the Aruba Tourism Authority when it finally became the much desired Sui Generis, up until 2017.

Total of about 34 years in the tourism business.

“It was an incredible journey with notable challenges, never a dull moment, and a lot of fun, and with a great team. Now I’m a busy retiree handling a couple of private businesses, making it a priority to enjoy and appreciate other beautiful things in life.”

First Female Director of ATA and leadership style:

“I never obsessed about myself as a FEMALE leader. With time I noted that I was indeed surrounded by mostly male leaders. Once at a large international tourism event in Aruba, I was the only female leader amongst 20 men in a photograph. That was quite a realization. And that was about 15 years ago. However, this year, I saw a similar photograph. So yes, there are more and more women in the business, but I’m not sure there’s a significant increase of women in the highest positions in the tourism industry. I do see more (young) women entrepreneurs, heading their own companies, and doing what they love. That is a rewarding development.”

She thinks women have an organic ability to see the total picture, to envision the future with more understanding of personal and professional challenges, more compassion. “I think in general we work hard and smart, are committed and engaged. We take our jobs very seriously and work passionately.”

Myrna thinks it’s definitely more challenging for women to be at the helm. “To be heard and understood and respected requires more effort, persistence, persuasion, more of everything basically. And if you have a family balance can become an issue.”

Myrna’s words of wisdom on leadership: “I don’t think women have to compete with men. Compete with yourself: become the better you. Do your utmost, get better at what you do. I think an organization flourishes with the input of both the men and women as they complement each other in business as well as in many other aspects of life. That’s a good thing.”

About meaningful achievements:

According to Myrna, the team effort was extremely important. “We built a lot of awareness internally and externally of how important our roles were in the success of tourism, the driver of the economy. We built strong teams and integrated a lot of efforts in order to work as creatively and effectively as possible with the limited government funds.”

-She believes the most innovative project was the introduction of Aruba.com as a powerful marketing tool.

Around 2003 ATA moved towards digital media, digital content with web developers worldwide. “We were leaders in direct email marketing, CRM, the first island in the Caribbean with a Bridal Registry, Online chat options, Community forum, aruba.com on all number plates (up to today), Expedia White label bookings, Content Management system. Seventeen years ago, it was innovation and leadership.”

-“Un Aruba Dushi pa Biba, ta un Aruba Dushi pa Bishita” was a slogan Myrna created to emphasize that we all have to do our utmost to make Aruba a “dushi” place to live. Consequently, naturally/organically we would express that happiness to the visitor.

“Dushi pa Biba” is key for me and really represents my strong belief that tourism can only remain successful if we can create the best quality of life for our own residents. I proposed a policy of product development. We introduced multiple awareness programs, concentrated in schools, pushing sustainability in our policy notes. I must say it has been a slow process. As years have gone by, there seems to be more push towards this philosophy.”

Notably, some tourism professionals that have become tourism experts in their area of work, see Myrna as an inspirational leader. “Perhaps that’s the achievement that I personally appreciate the most.”

During her 34 years in the tourism business, Myrna received the following awards and recognitions:

- *Lifetime Achievement SHOCO Award by the Aruba tourism industry
- *Visionary Award of Excellence by the Aruba Conventions Bureau
- *International Society of Incentive Travel (SITE) nominee,
- *Iguana Award by ARTOUSA
- *Woman of the Year Award by DIARIO
- *Top Ten Women by FOCUS magazine

How have you accomplished work/life balance?

“I have only been able to have a balanced life in the past few years.....a healthy holistic living. Balance is hard to accomplish. All those years at the ATA, I thought I was balanced. My definition of balance was to do everything I thought was important, from work to family matters (husband and 3 children), to fitness to spiritual interests.

In reality, I was constantly running from one thing to another. There was quite a bit of stress involved, but at that time it seemed just normal. Even though I loved the tourism business and its adrenaline rush, it’s a 24/7 dynamic industry with regular crises that required constant hands-on attention. During my tenure, we had 3 significant crisis situations that kept our hands full, as we put substantial effort in minimizing the negative impact on our tourism industry: September 11, 2001; Natalee Holloway disappearance in 2005; and the

economic crisis 2007/2008 onward. I must say, that I had a lot of support from my husband Ivan (who was also busy with his music career) and of course the ATA Team, but even so, balance remains a difficult thing when you're at the helm of such a dynamic industry. The entire economy of the island depends on tourism and that's a lot to carry on your shoulders. When I retired, I realized the real meaning of balance.

I totally encourage living a full, mindful, simplified, holistic life. I am happy that my husband and three children, Michella, Serghio and Ivana, can now experience me living this balanced life..... I am grateful for this blessing. “

What are your hobbies:

“Health and Wellness have taken a good part of my time during the past few years. I've enjoyed the research, gaining knowledge, and implementing them in my life has been rewarding. I also enjoy sharing my knowledge on those topics.

I enjoy cooking (creatively), hosting, reading, gardening, beaching, and constantly searching for deeper spirituality.... And more, I have finally been able to reach a balance in my life. And it's priceless.”

What message would you like to convey to female professionals in our community?

Work smart

Be committed

Be passionate about your work – self-motivation is key

Do go the extra mile

Increase your knowledge on a daily basis

Learn everything about the business

Be proud of the work that you do

Savor your accomplishments

Your contribution IS important

Have fun

Be true to yourself

It's not about women vs men, it's about collaboration, cooperation, complementing- working together as a team

So by all means, do that,

And also implement ways to manage stress, because chronic stress is not normal. Yes, practice mindfulness, exercise, and take your time to eat healthy. Enjoy the little things of life. Be grateful for all the wonderful blessings of life, take care of your family, and enjoy your family and friends. Indulge in non-work-related activities (hobbies) and be conscious of and pursue your spiritual needs.

Impactful Women Project is a WOW Aruba initiative to highlight empowered women who realized their dreams by impacting our community and paving the way for many after them.

Do you know any #ImpactfulWoman? Send us her info!

As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. - NM.

WOW Aruba

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